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ASSASSINS' SQUADS LINKED TO MOSCOW

A Defector Says Special Units Would Have Mission to Kill Foreign Leaders in War

By DREW MIDDLETON

A Soviet defector, writing in an American military publication, says that in a war with the West, Soviet Special Forces would have the task of assassinating Western political and military leaders and destroying nuclear and other installations.

He says teams of the K.G.B., the intelligence and security agency, would also have assassination missions.

His account, written under the pseudonym of Viktor Suvorov, appears in the current issue of Military Review, published by the United States Army's Command and General Staff College at Leavenworth, Kan.

An editor's note in the journal says that, if Mr. Suvorov's facts are correct, some of these potential attackers have already been visiting target areas at the West's invitation, since they are among the most accomplished athletes in the Soviet Union.

Mr. Suvorov, a former Soviet Army officer who lives in Britain, has published two books since he defected a few years ago — "The Liberators," an account of his experiences during the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, and "Inside the Soviet Army," a description of military organization, strategy, equipment and personnel.

Linked to Swedish Intrusions

In his article in Military Review, Mr. Suvorov says naval units of the Soviet Special Forces were involved in submarine intrusions into Swedish territorial waters in both 1982 and 1983. Two of the vessels used, he writes, were minisubmarines designed for use on combat intelligence missions.

Although Western intelligence services have known of the existence of the Soviet Special Forces, this is believed by military experts to be the first definitive account of the units' missions and command structure.

Mr. Suvorov says the forces, known by the Russian acronym Spetsnaz, which stands for "special purpose" forces, are part of the Main Intelligence Directorate (G.R.U.) of the General Staff. He says the intelligence service runs a special forces brigade and an intelligence center. The center recruits its own foreign agents in competition with the K.G.B.

To American analysts the most sinister branch of the Special Forces is what Mr. Suvorov describes as a group of professionals, usually operating in civilian clothes, whose mission in war would be to find and kill Western military and political leaders.

He says the Special Forces would also be charged with wrecking nuclear installations or identifying them for Soviet missiles or bombs, attacking command centers of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, destroying key targets such as air bases and disrupting Western communications.

In a war, Mr. Suvorov writes, the Russians would have 41 Special Forces companies, one with each army, and 16 brigades attached to each front, or army group. There also would be four naval brigades, he says, one with each Soviet fleet, and 20 intelligence units.

The peacetime strength is estimated at 27,000 to 30,000, but these figures do not include support units.

Mr. Suvorov says East German, Polish and other Warsaw Pact troops also operate as Special Forces and, in most cases, would wear Western uniforms and speak Western languages.

Because its wartime duties and peacetime training are so rigorous, Mr. Suvorov says, the organization attracts athletes. In return, the athletes receive special privileges.

Consequently, the defector adds, there is competition between the G.R.U. and the K.G.B. for athletes.

NATO's ability to cope with the Special Forces, a Western operations officer noted, would rest on the effectiveness of local forces defending the home front.

West Germany, for example, has assigned 12 home defense brigades and 15 home defense regiments to the defense of air and missile bases, command headquarters and communications.